THE PHANTOM™
GHOST WHO WALKS
#6
MOONSTONE™
$3.99
cover A
Mike Bullock
Silvestre Szilagyi

THE PHANTOM™
GHOST WHO WALKS

created by LEE FALK

For those who came in late...

NEARLY 500 YEARS AGO ON A REMOTE BANGALLAN BEACH, ONLY ONE SURVIVED A VICIOUS PIRATE ATTACK.
THE FIRST PHANTOM SWORE A SACRED OATH ON THE SKULL OF HIS FATHER'S KILLER.
...WILL DEVOTE MY LIFE TO THE DESTRUCTION OF PIRACY, GREED, CRUELTY AND INJUSTICE!
GENERATION AFTER GENERATION FOLLOWED, BUT TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD, HE WAS ALWAYS ONE MAN... IMMORTAL.
NOW THE 21ST PHANTOM HAUNTS THE NIGHTMARES OF EVIL MEN EVERYWHERE.

"RETURN OF THE EASTERN DARK" part two

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SPECIAL THANKS TO
OUR PHANTOM CONSULTANT
ED RHOADES

AND TO *KAREN MOY*
AT KING FEATURES

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DEEP IN THE RUINS OF THE EASTERN DARK
SHE'S BEEN IN THERE FOR SEVERAL HOURS AND I'M NO CLOSER TO FINDING A WAY OUT OF THIS MESS.
FINALLY! WHEN THEY BRING HER BACK HERE I CAN MAKE MY MOVE.
LET ME GO!
WAIT! WHERE ARE THEY GOING?
YOU ARE A FINE SPECIMEN, FOR AN AMERICAN. ZAAL WILL REWARD US GREATLY FOR YOUR BLOOD.

JAIME!
YOUR TIME FOR PURIFICATION WILL COME SOON ENOUGH!
GRRRR
WHA-?
-JERK-
JINGLE
TIME TO GET OUTTA HERE, DEVIL.
LOOK! THE ODD MAN FOUND A WAY OUT! COME ON!

BACK IN THE CELL OR ZAAL WILL STRIKE YOU DEAD WHERE YOU STAND!
SOUND THE ALARM!
WEEEEEEEEEOOOOOOOOWEEEEEEEEEOOOOOOOOWEEEEEEEEEOOOOOOOOW
GO! KILL ANYONE WHO DARES DEFY ZAAL!
COUNT YOURSELVES LUCKY THAT THE ANGRY GOD DID NOT KILL YOU ALREADY!
WHY DIDN'T HE? IF HE'S SO ALL-POWERFUL, WHAT STOPPED HIM FROM KILLING US, OR THE MAN WHO ESCAPED?
SILENCE!
THIS STAFF CONTAINS THE ANGER OF ZAAL AND YOU HAVE JUST EARNED A TASTE FOR YOURSELF!

SYUHS
WH-?
STAY HERE OR I'LL KILL YOU MYSELF.

KRAK
UHH-
THIS COULD BE OUR CHANCE!
ARE YOU MAD? WE HAVE NO IDEA WHAT'S OUT THERE!
WE'LL NEVER FIND OUT COWERING IN HERE.

THE GHOST...

DON'T WORRY, I'M NOT ZAAL.
INTERESTING...
WH-WHAT'S "INTERESTING"?
THEIR STICKS AREN'T POWERED BY ZAAL'S ANGER. UNLESS IT WORKS ON DIRECT CURRENT...
HERE, TAKE THIS, YOU MIGHT NEED IT. GRAB THE OTHER ONES FROM THE TWO OUTSIDE AND GET EVERYONE OUT OF HERE.
DEVIL, YOU STAY WITH THEM. I'M GOING AFTER JAIME.

MATATA! THE PRISONERS ARE TRYING TO ESCAPE!
TAKE THIS ONE TO THE ALTAR, WHILE I DEAL WITH THE OTHERS.
COME, WOMAN, YOUR TIME IS AT HAND!
GET OFF ME, YOU WHACK JOB!
YOU WILL SUBMIT OR I'LL BLEED YOU RIGHT HERE!
NOT IF HE HAS ANYTHING TO SAY ABOUT IT.
WHACK

THIS WAY! IF YOU CAN HIDE OUT WITH THE OTHERS FOR A FEW MINUTES, I SHOULD BE ABLE TO FIND YOU A WAY OUT OF HERE.

THERE WAS SOMETHING REALLY WEIRD ABOUT THAT PURIFICATION PROCESS. I WANT TO SEE THAT STATUE AGAIN FIRST

IF I DIDN'T KNOW ANY BETTER...

YEP! SO MUCH FOR THEIR "TRIBAL MAGIC"...

WHAT'S ALL THAT?
THAT, MY GUARDIAN, IS THE POWER AND CAT-5 CABLES

EVERYTHING NECESSARY TO RUN A PROPER MAGNETIC RESONANCE IMAGINING SCANNER
A WHAT?
AN MRI

BUT, WHY ON EARTH WOULD THEY USE AN MRI AND CALL IT "PURIFICATION"?

WE TRAPPED THE GUARDS IN THE CELL— WHAT'S GOING ON?

WELL, I WASN'T "PURIFIED" I WAS SCANNED
"SCANNED"?
YEAH, THIS IS AN MRI, NOT A "PURIFICATION ALTAR".
THIS JUST GETS WEIRDER BY THE MINUTE

I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT YOU'RE THINKING. THERE IS NO "ANGRY GOD". JUST A BUNCH OF GOONS TRYING TO HIDE SOMETHING.

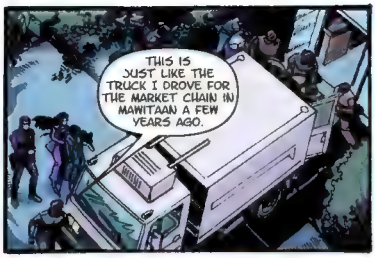
EXACTLY. QUESTION IS, WHAT?

FIND A PLACE IN THE TREES BACK THERE AND WAIT FOR US WHILE WE GO FIND OUT

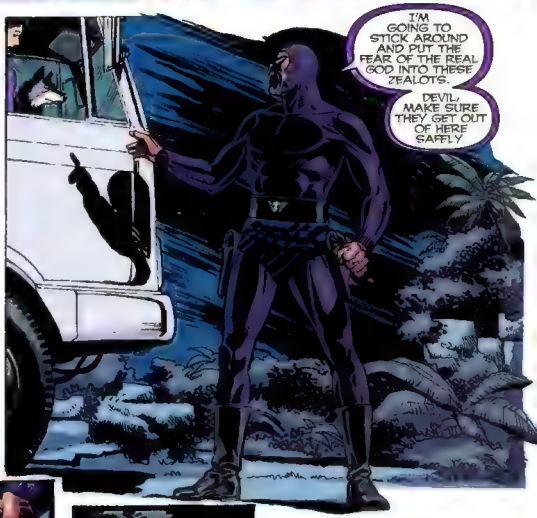
IN HERE. WE CAN HIDE IN THE UNDERBRUSH
SOMETHING TELLS ME THAT PILE OF ROCKS ISN'T FULL OF ANCIENT ARTIFACTS...
THE OTHERS CAN TAKE THAT TRUCK AND GET TO SAFETY.
DEVIL, GO GET JAIME AND THE REST OF THE PRISONERS, AND BRING THEM BACK HERE.
NOW, WHAT ARE THEY USING THIS TRUCK FOR, BESIDES KIDNAPPING...
JAIME WAS RIGHT THIS REALLY IS GETTING WEIRD...

BIOHAZARD CONTAINERS, TASERS, MRI SCANNERS-- THIS IS DEFINITELY NOT THE EASTERN DARK I REMEMBER...
WHAT ARE THEY HIDING IN HERE?
ORGANS? NOW IT ALL MAKES SENSE!
HUMAN ORGAN
FOR TRANSPLANT
JAIME SALAMY
HEART ABLATION
LOOKS LIKE I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE THAT APPRECIATES HER BIG HEART...
THIS IS EVEN CREEPIER THAN DEALING WITH CANNIBALS...

TAKE THIS TRUCK AND GET AS FAR FROM HERE AS YOU CAN


THIS IS JUST LIKE THE TRUCK I DROVE FOR THE MARKET CHAIN IN MAWITAAN A FEW YEARS AGO.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?


I'M GOING TO STICK AROUND AND PUT THE FEAR OF THE REAL GOD INTO THESE ZEALOTS.
DEVIL, MAKE SURE THEY GET OUT OF HERE SAFELY

VRRRRRRRR

NEVER JUDGE A BOOK..

...

FINISH CRATING UP WHAT YOU JUST HARVESTED AND ENGAGE CONTINGENCY PLAN C, IMMEDIATELY

GUARDS, COME WITH ME AND BRING THE AK'S I WANT TO EXTERMINATE THESE PRISONERS AND BE ON TO THE NEXT BASE BEFORE THE SUN RISES

WE'VE ALMOST HIT OUR QUOTA, HE'LL BE PLEASED.
HE WILL INDEED THINK OF THIS AS A HOMECOMING GIFT
TOO BAD WE HAVE TO BURN THIS PLACE, I DIDN'T THINK ANYONE WOULD EVER FIND US HERE.

THAT'S WHY WE PUT THE CONTINGENCY PLAN IN PLACE TOMORROW NO ONE WILL KNOW WE WERE EVER HERE

NOW, LET'S GO TIE UP SOME LOOSE ENDS, BOYS

SHOOT TO KILL. I DON'T WANT TO TAKE ANY CHANCES.
YES, SIR!
EVEN IF THEY SURRENDER, KILL THEM. THEY MADE THEIR FATE WHEN THEY CROSSED "THE WILL OF ZAAL"
HEH.
WHA-?
KRUNCH

THUNG CLANG
SNK
GAH!

RAAAAA!

DIE!
GRAH!
YOU'RE OBVIOUSLY NOT THE EASTERN DARK OF OLD... ARE YOU EVEN RELATED TO THE PRINCE?
WHAT "PRINCE"?
YOU DON'T ACTUALLY BELIEVE THOSE OLD LEGENDS?
I AM ONE OF THOSE OLD LEGENDS
YOU'RE JUST A MAN, NOTHING MORE!

WHOMP
>GUH<
UHHH
YOU MUST DIE!
LEGENDS NEVER DIE.
WHAM

THIS IS IT!
INSIDE THOSE BUILDINGS, YOU'LL FIND EVERYTHING!
RAK!
WHERE YA GOING?

GET THEM IN THE TRUCK. I WANT THESE MEN IN THE MAWITAAN PRISON BY MIDDAY!
JP
YOU HEARD THE COLONEL, IN THE TRUCK!
IT'S TOO BAD YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT THIS PLACE BEFORE THEY "SACRIFICED" SO MANY INNOCENT PEOPLE.
THIS ISN'T OVER YET. THESE GOONS WEREN'T DOING THIS ON THEIR OWN.
DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHO THEY WERE WORKING FOR?
I OVERHEARD SOMETHING IN THE OPERATING CHAMBER THAT GAVE ME A PRETTY GOOD IDEA.
TRUST ME THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING.
AND IT WILL SOON BE YOUR END, PHANTOM!
To Be Continued.

BEHIND THE MASK

By Ed Rhoades

Fathers and Sons

About eighteen years ago, I found myself standing outside of a comic shop which featured a window display of Phantom reprints. The attraction was irresistible, and I entered a comic store for the very first time. I purchased one of the books despite the fact it seemed a bit expensive… certainly more than I had ever paid for a comic book or a magazine, but it caused a flood of memories to emerge. My earliest recollections of my father who had just passed away were of me sitting on his knee each day as he read the Phantom strip aloud. Revisiting those old Lee Falk stories brought a pleasure I hadn't felt in years… and a stronger connection to my father.

I couldn't wait to get home to read them. They also brought to mind my next door neighbor who taught 6th grade long enough to have both my father and I as students. When she learned how determined I was to learn to read the strip by myself, she spent her own time lending her patience and teaching skill. Thanks to the kindly help of Miss Pegg and my father, I began reading the strip when I was four. Even years later in school, I was far beyond my grade level in reading and I credited it to my love of The Phantom. When I first met Lee at the Great Eastern at the Javitz Center, I told him my story. He told me that he had heard that story many times from people around the world.

I've often thought about that conversation with Lee. The Phantom strip has been estimated as having as many as 60 million daily readers on a global level. When you add Lee's other strip, Mandrake The Magician to the mix, he has reached a lot of people… and when you consider that he wrote comic strips from 1934 until his death an 1999, he also reached generations where fathers passed their interest in his stories to their sons.

The most powerful thing about the Phantom stories is the legacy… the fact that for more than 800 years the mantle of the Phantom has been passed from father to son. Each son has a reverence for the entire line and reads the exploits of his ancestors and writes his own for future generations. The stories contain the celebration of the son and the sadness of losing a father.
Sometimes in the story, someone who has an encounter with 'The Ghost Who Walks' will mention a similar experience recounted to them by their father… or grandfather.
Lee even wrote one story about an old time criminal getting out of prison to team up with his son.

Lee often told humorous stories with a twinkle in his eye… and was even known to pull a prank or two, but there was one occasion which he was the recipient of a joke by his own son.
It was at the party for the 50th year of The Phantom, Lee was greeted by a person dressed as Mandrake who said "You created me."

Lee smiled and replied, "It's an actor dressed as Mandrake. I've seen that before."
But this time, the joke was on the creator. Upon closer examination, Lee found the actor was actually his son Conley who flew in from California to surprise his father.

Lee's daughter, Valerie, told me that Lee would tell his ongoing Mandrake and Phantom adventures as bedtime stories for her and her siblings. They would eagerly ask him what happens next and he would reply, "…to be continued." She said he was still working out the plots.

Lee told me that he gauged his children's reactions and said if they were excited, he knew he had a good story. It's interesting that the same thing occurs in his stories where the Phantom reads to his children from the chronicles.

Imagine how much fun it must have been for children to have one of the world's best storytellers share his stories with you each night as he was just making them up.

The Ghost Who Dies

By

Clay & Susan Griffith

Horn fumbled back till he was near the window. "I had nothing to do with it!" With manic desperation, he smashed his elbow through the cheap glass and jumped out onto the overhang directly beneath

Kagame rushed to grab him, but the man jumped to the ground below. He turned on the Phantom ready to berate him for his inability to stop a common criminal, but the room was empty. Kagame spun around in confusion, then turned back to the broken window and scanned the crowded street below. He didn't see Horn, but he did see the Phantom as he slipped out of the shadows and signaled up for Kagame to follow.

It took only a moment for the young man to race out of the taphouse and find the Phantom. He was breathless by the time he caught up, but the Phantom immediately took off at a run. The two men raced through Rwilmu, flashed past the African huts on the edge of the ragged trader town, and dove into the forest beyond.

Kagame followed, with his breath pounding out. "How could he escape? From you?"

"He hasn't." The Phantom didn't pause to explain, but he did slow his pace, focused on following the prints his quarry left plainly in sight on the jungle path. Plainly in sight to the Phantom anyway. He put out a hand to slow Kagame who abruptly snapped out in frustration.

"Why do you delay?"

"We won't lose him. He isn't that good."

Kagame regarded him coldly and intelligently. "So you do not think he killed Nzige?"

"No."

"We have learned nothing then!" Kagame exclaimed.

The Phantom continued moving. "I hope he'll tell us a great deal yet. But from here out we must be absolutely silent." He turned to Kagame and regarded him compellingly. "You must trust me."

A retort stood ready on Kagame's lips, but he offered a curt nod instead. He knew well the stories of the Ghost Who Walks, who was eternal and just. Still, he had seen the Ghost kill Nzige with his own eyes. But he had to admit the hunt they were on called to the old ways when, with spear in hand, the Bangalla hunted prey and their enemies. It was real. It was powerful. And sharing the hunt let you learn a man's heart, perhaps even a god's heart. Kagame wasn't so sure of his convictions anymore. Was this what his father had felt and why he had placed such blind faith in this god?

The two men stopped at the edge of a clearing where a deafening roar filled the air. The river in flood, and not far away. On the far side of the clearing was a ramshackle hut, a shack slapped up by ivory hunters decades before while obliterating the district's elephants.

Kagame was drenched in sweat and exhausted though the Phantom seemed unfazed by their exertions. The African sank to a crouch, grateful for the respite. He felt a cool breath of wind and then the first splash of raindrops. In seconds, the air was filled with pounding water. The hut was now a vague gray shape through the deluge.

The Phantom didn't say a word, but motioned for Kagame to stay put. One moment he was there and the next he was gone. Kagame blinked as if his vision was no longer reliable. It made him realize that he was indeed walking with a spirit, and again his shame swelled.

In just a few minutes, the Phantom returned. "Horn is in that shack. You wait here."

"Why are we waiting?" The roar of the rain and the river made it hard to hear.

"We'll know soon enough." The Ghost Who Walks melted into the dripping foliage.

• • •

Kagame huddled wet for a long while. The rain stopped but the heavy dripping continued all around. Mist began to rise with the returning heat.

Finally he saw the Phantom slipping silently through the high grass as he sidled up the bark wall of the hut where Horn was hiding. The mysterious figure pulled out his gun as Horn shuffled again to the doorway to peer out. The Phantom stepped round, his arm swung hard, connecting with a startled trader. The Phantom took aim at the helpless man on the ground.

Kagame leapt to his feet and shouted with a stricken voice, "No! No more killing!"

The Ghost Who Dies

The Phantom turned and saw the young man tearing through the sea of sodden grass, waving his arms. The soulless eyes of the Ghost Who Walks tightened on Kagame, in a way they never had before. The prince staggered to a halt as the Phantom turned his gun on him. Now the young Bangalla knew what Nzige felt when the god took his life. A cold gripped him as if he were already in the bowels of the deep earth.

Then from Kagame's right came another flash of purple.

There were two Phantoms!

The two spirits crashed back into the hut. One rolled smoothly into a crouch on the far side, while the other fluidly came to his feet near the door.

The Phantom stood and stared at his double. The stranger was just as tall and lithe, well muscled without massive bulk to slow down the power. It was obvious he had trained well. He had been so stealthy that the Phantom had almost missed him as he approached the hut.

The imposter smiled. He wasn't alarmed at being discovered. It was then the Phantom's gut twisted. He had used Horn to lure the killer. But now he realized this fake had hoped he would show. This was the man who had hunted him in the jungle. He was in the same trap.

"Who are you?" The Phantom wanted to know this above all. Who was this man who had dared to strike at him in his home and attack those he had sworn to protect? And dared to dress as the Phantom.

The stranger answered, "I'm the 18th Phantom."

The Phantom stared at this man in his purple costume, unsure how to deal with what he'd just heard.

The imposter said, "You have my life!"

"I don't understand you."

"My mother's legacy should be mine! Not yours!"

The Phantom started. "Your mother?"

"My mother." The imposter's face was flushed with rage. "Your aunt."

"Julie." The Phantom knew the name well. It was part of his family history. The lineage had been recited to him over and over by his father. Julie was his father's twin sister. And she was the only woman ever to have taken up the mantle of the Phantom. When his father was injured, she donned the cowl and carried on the fight for justice in his absence. When he was able to fight again, she stepped aside and eventually moved to England to live a normal life.

The imposter snarled, "Did you forget my mother was the Phantom?"

Suddenly, everything fell into place. This was Julie's son.

"You're Daniel," the Phantom said. "My cousin."

"I am the Phantom!" the other man screamed, as if that alone would make it true.

"No. You are not."

"I am justice incarnate!" The imposter pointed at Horn cowering on the floor. "He is a criminal and I will make him see truth right before your eyes."

"Like you made Nzige see truth?"

"He was a criminal! He was bringing illegal guns into my jungle! He deserved his fate! And I knew such drastic action would bring you out."

"You killed Nzige?" Kagame stepped forward angrily from the doorway.

The Phantom put out his arm to stop the young African from going any closer to this mad man.

"The Phantom doesn't kill," the Phantom pointed out to Daniel.

"We do when we have to."

"Nzige was asleep in his home!" Kagame cried in shock. "There was no need to kill him."

"It was justice," Daniel said.

"It was murder," the Phantom replied. "Which proves you're not the Phantom."

The eyes of the imposter narrowed, filling with rage. "A Phantom seeks out criminals and delivers punishment!"

"Brings criminals to justice. At least get it right."

"Don't lecture me!"

The imposter rushed toward him like a bull, anger seething from him. The Phantom shoved Kagame backwards out of the hut and then had just enough time to brace before his opponent hit. Miraculously he kept his feet, sliding out of the hut into the mud.

The sun blasted out in a suddenly blue sky. Mist began to rise and roil around the two spirits in the waist high grass. They fought like two devils. They were matched strength for strength, move for move. The Phantom's adversary mirrored each carefully honed strike. He had been taught all the self-defense arts also. It was like fighting a shadow of himself. Strike. Feint. Retreat. The Phantom's greater skill was evenly matched by Daniel's crusading passion.

Their struggle passed from the grass to the forest. They danced deftly around massive roots exposed above red earth. Water dripped into pools around them. Birds fluttered up through the shafts of light penetrating the cathedral-like canopy of green.

The Ghost Who Dies

Dwarfed by the giants around them, the two ghosts fought on, silent except for the creak of leather and the sound of flesh against bone. Their faces showed no pain, even from the worst blows.

Then Daniel started to fall. His booted foot slipped in the mud. The Phantom sensed advantage and charged. But at the last instant, he saw an unnatural arch to Daniel's back, an odd tenseness to his muscles. He wasn't falling at all. The Phantom rolled to one side as Daniel's feet flashed past in what would have been a devastating blow to the head. The imposter clutched a thick creeper for leverage. But now he was off his feet and vulnerable so he pulled himself aloft as easily as a great ape. In seconds he was beyond reach in the trees. The Phantom followed.

They leapt and swung in a dizzying chase, two purple shades slipping through a bright green world. Separated from the ground by a hundred feet of merciless air crowded with bone-cracking limbs and neck-snapping creepers.

Finally, they stood face to face. The two men were only a few feet apart on a branch barely four inches wide extending over the roaring turmoil of the river that boiled white and spit fountains. Below them, chunks of riverbank tore free and tumbled helpless into the churning chaos, tumbling red and green in the white water.

The Phantom kept both feet anchored while Daniel lashed out at him with devastating blows. The Phantom's forearms took hard strikes as he blocked. He landed three solid hits on Daniel, but the imposter slipped through his defenses and slammed a wrenching shot to his ribs. The Phantom caved at the waist. Daniel moved in, but sensed the trap and flinched back as the palm of the Phantom hit him a glancing blow on his hip. But it was enough. His mud-covered boots slipped on the moss that covered the branch. The moss was as slick as ice when wet, a fact the local Bandar pygmies – and the Phantom – knew so well.

Daniel lost his balance. And it was no feint. His face broke from the terrifying realization of failure as he toppled toward the monster waters below.

A strong hand seized Daniel's wrist and used his own falling momentum to propel him over the river's edge and back over the quagmire of a bank. The Phantom flipped to the ground after him as Daniel was already struggling to his feet.

The Phantom's right fist struck like the dart of an adder and landed on Daniel's jaw, whipping his head around with a crack. The imposter grunted in pain and for the first time paused in his attack, his hand snapping up to hold the left side of his face. He knew what burned there. His eyes were riveted to the Phantom's fist and the skull ring glittering there

Daniel's jaw clenched and his eyes widened in horror. He was marked! He was marked as a lowly criminal! He had the skull on his jaw line. No Phantom could ever carry that mark!

"No!" he screamed. He straightened up and glared at the man who had scarred him for life.

"No criminal deserved it more," said the Phantom quietly. "Your mother would be ashamed of you. This is not what she wanted."

"My mother risked her life to carry on the legacy! And yet when it came down to choosing who would be the next in line, she was cast aside! I was cast aside! She trained me as well as any of the others!"

"She knew and understood the tradition." The Phantom knew this to be true in his heart though a part of him wondered why would she have trained her son at all.

"You aren't even married!" Daniel shrieked. "You have no sons. You don't care about the future of the line. My mother thought about it constantly. If you die the line will end! She knew that could happen. It almost happened to your father."

That explained things a bit more clearly to the Phantom. Daniel's mother had only been insuring the line held, that just in case there would always be a Phantom. It had been a contingency plan only. Unfortunately Daniel took it to heart. He had spent so much time training, he came to believe that he would be a Phantom. And when that didn't happen, he must have snapped.

"The line will remain secure." The Phantom made a final plea to the hero inside the man. "But having backup is always wise in this line of work. You could have been my backup, just as your mother was for my father."

For a split second, Daniel considered that possibility. But the burning on his cheek told him otherwise. The legacy of the Phantom was beyond him now. Whatever his adversary offered him now it was a lie. A scarred criminal could never be a Phantom.

He regarded the Phantom. "You've won, just as your father won."

"This was never a competition."

"Only to those who already have the prize." He reached up and pulled back the cowl. Sweat dampened his hair, the small red outline of the skull burned bright against his pale skin of his jaw line. He took a step back.

"Wait!" The Phantom stared into Daniel's eyes for the first time. They were green like his mother's, but full of despair.

Daniel took a step back as the riverbank beneath him crumbled. Without a struggle or a sound, he disappeared into the water's furious maw. A single flash of purple and then he was pulled under.

There was no hope. There was no saving a man from that fury.

The Phantom shuddered, but he quickly realized it was because the ground under his own feet was tearing itself apart. Water surged up, shredding the mud, and rising around his booted ankles. He turned to escape, but his legs sank into the mire. It crossed his mind that he was going to join his cousin. And he felt a surge of hateful disappointment that there was no Phantom to carry on the line.

Something strong grabbed him. The red mud dissolved and vanished into the churning water as the Phantom fell back onto solid ground. Another figure fell beside him. The two rose at the same time and scrambled back to a massive tree where the earth felt

solid.

The Phantom turned to Kagame. "Thank you."

"You're welcome." Kagame breathed heavily with a look of youthful exhilaration. "So, you are a man. Like me."

"Yes. Very much like you."

"Does my father know?"

"Yes. The chief of the Bangalla has always known the secret of the Ghost Who Walks. You would have been told in time."

"What became of the other Ghost?"

"He's gone."

"He was your kinsman?"

"Yes. My cousin. He thought he should have been the Phantom. He was wrong."

Kagame smiled. He understood power struggles on a basic level. He had heard stories of his father's climb to power. And he expected he would face challenges in his time too.

The Phantom asked, "Where is Horn?"

Kagame replied, "Back in the hut. He will not escape."

The Phantom eyed the young man questioningly.

"He is alive," the African replied with a grin. "I left him for your law."

"Thank you. What will you do now?"

Kagame thought for a second. "Return home. Take my place at my father's side. Help him preserve the Bangalla. I will do what I can."

The Phantom nodded. "You are your father's son. Time passes. History will change again and again, perhaps for the better, perhaps for the worst. But you must keep the things that matter. Justice. Honor. Family." He placed a hand on the young man's shoulder. "It's all any of us can do."

* * *

The large mahogany door swung open and the aged butler gazed at the man who stood on the landing. There was something odd and imposing about him. Carriages and hansom cabs clattered along the cobblestones behind him, hooves beating a steady rhythm. The streets were crowded with people rushing home in the darkening winter evening. Still, this stranger seemed apart from the London night. Even the damp English wind that swept in behind him, fluttering his long black cloak, brought a strange hint of warm earth and lush blossoms. The stranger's strong face was shadowed by a wide-brimmed hat and smoked glasses.

The butler asked, "Yes sir?"

"Is Her Ladyship at home?"

The butler's face remained impassive. "She is, sir. Who may I say is calling at this hour?"

The tall man slipped a leather glove off his right hand. He worked his fingers. He then held out a closed hand to the butler. The servant instinctively raised the silver platter he carried and heard a heavy clang as the stranger dropped something on the tray. The butler looked down at the object. It was a ring with a startling skull design.

"Sir?" the butler whispered, staring at the dreadful jewelry.

"Please show that to Her Ladyship. She'll understand."

"But, sir, I don't…"

A voice came from the dark foyer behind the butler. "Let him in, please, Hampton."

The stranger stepped into the dim townhouse. His shaded eyes pinned the woman standing at the base of the stairs. She was aging and slight and gray-haired. But she stood with the sureness of a tiger. He could sense her power in that still lithe body and strong face.

circumstances. He knew his aunt from his school days in England. He had never sensed resentment over his assumption of the Phantom role. And he never would, he admonished himself. Her Ladyship would never seek to do him harm on purpose. He had faith in her as the Bangalla had faith in him.

She approached him with genuine affection. "How wonderful to see you! It's been far too long." Curving an arm through his she led him to the sitting room. Hampton followed and set the tray on the table next to them. "What peril brings you all the way to London?" Her eyes glinted with excitement, remembering all too well the heady thrill of adventure.

His face remained grim and she sobered. "What is it?

"It's about Daniel."

"Daniel? He's been traveling for years. What's happened?"

As she watched the face of the man beside her, she understood that the news he had brought was not good.

The sparkle in her eyes diminished. And as he watched her, the strength faded from her. She took the ring from the offered tray. She clutched it in her hands and shut her eyes as tears dropped wet on the marble floor.

Her voice was pained, "Won't you tell me about my son's death, Mr. Walker?"

"I will," replied the stranger. "It is a tale of honor and sacrifice."

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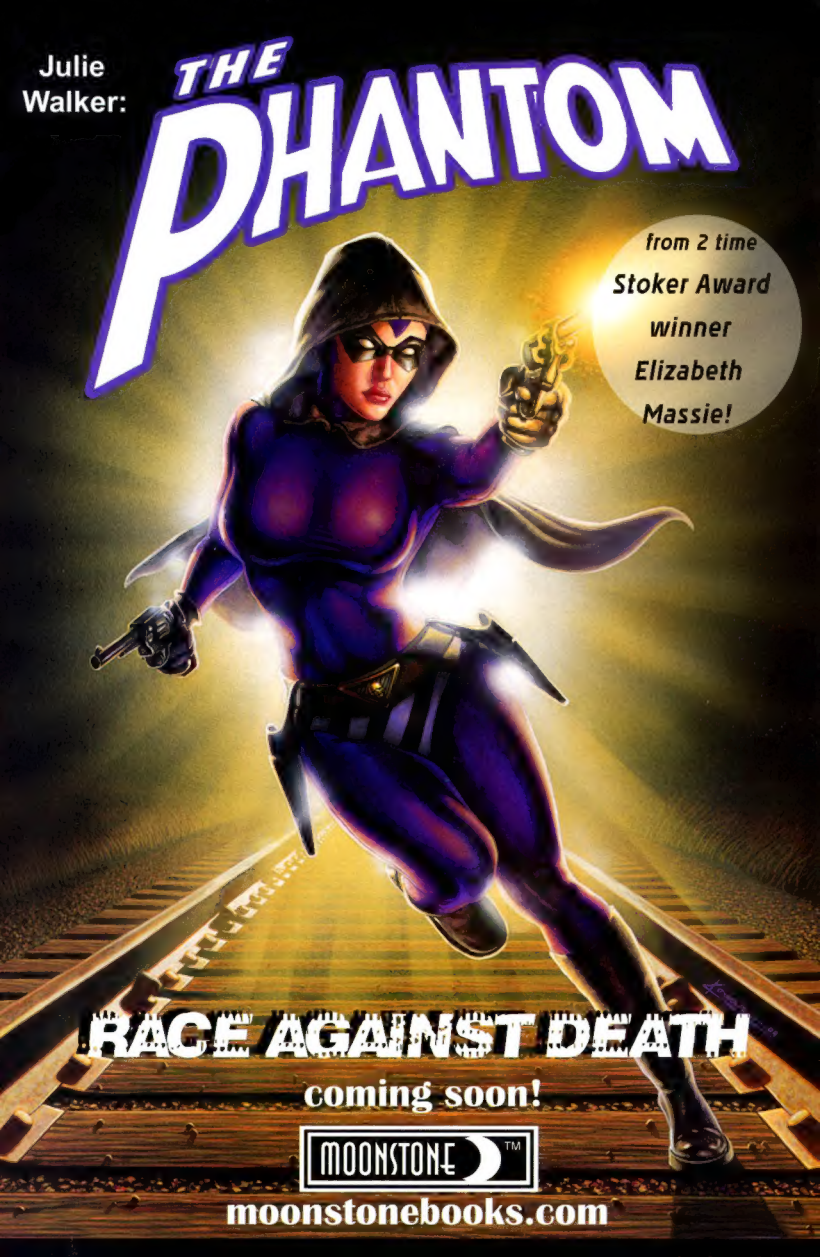
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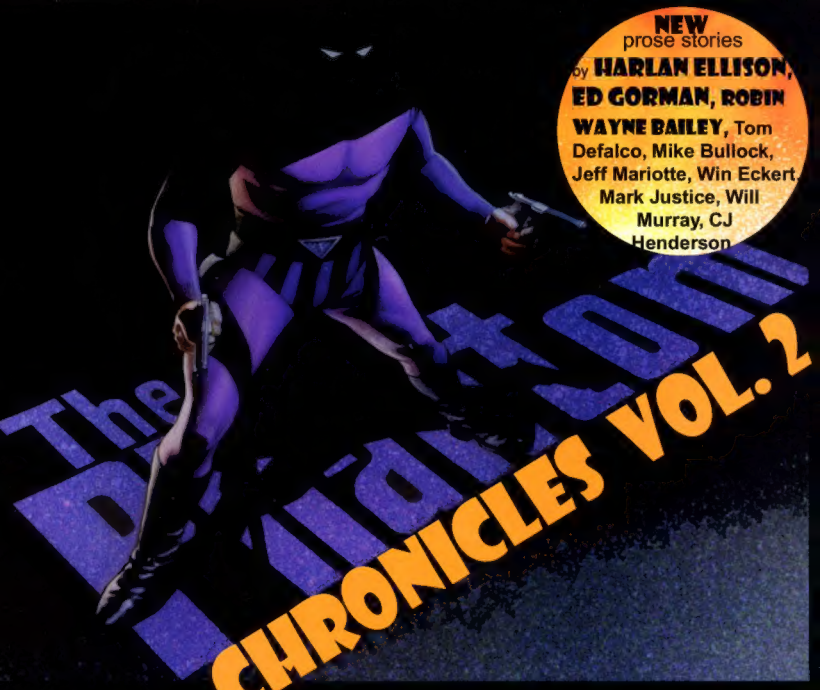
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